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Written and illustrated by

Patricia Gehman

in cooperation with
The
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Creative House, Billings, Montana

Pryor Mountain Country

Introduction

Wild horses and burrow have roamed the United States for hundreds of years. Today, wild horse herds are found in the western States of California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. All of the existing herds, at the present time, are protected under the Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971.

Most of the time these herds roam on public lands, lands which belong to all Americans. Aside from providing food for wild horses and burros, wildlife and livestock, these lands are important for other reasons, as well.

Often called "national resource lands," they are rich in scenic beauty, from the lonely desert to high mountains. They offer places to camp, hike, fish, hunt or to enjoy other kinds of recreation.

The public lands are historic, too. Remember Lewis and Clark, the Pony Express, and the Oregon Trail? Secrets of ancient Indian tribes are also found on these lands.

Today, these lands are an important source for timber, coal, oil and gas, gold, silver and many other minerals. You can see the national resource lands have many uses and values.

Having explained this, we hope "Thank You For Helping Us" will help you understand more about wild horses, and how one part of this land is managed for their protection and benefit. It is known as the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range.

thank you for helping us

Where did the wild horses of America come from? No one really knows for sure.

Some people believe that the Spaniards brought horses to this part of the world when they came to settle in what we now call Mexico.

The American Indians saw the small horses and wanted some for themselves. These small horses were called Andalusian and Barb horses. They would trade or lure the horses from the Spaniards and use them for travelling and hunting. Many of these horses escaped from the Indians. They then became wild horses, living off the land.

When the settlers came west, they brought horses with them. Some of these horses wandered off and they too became wild.

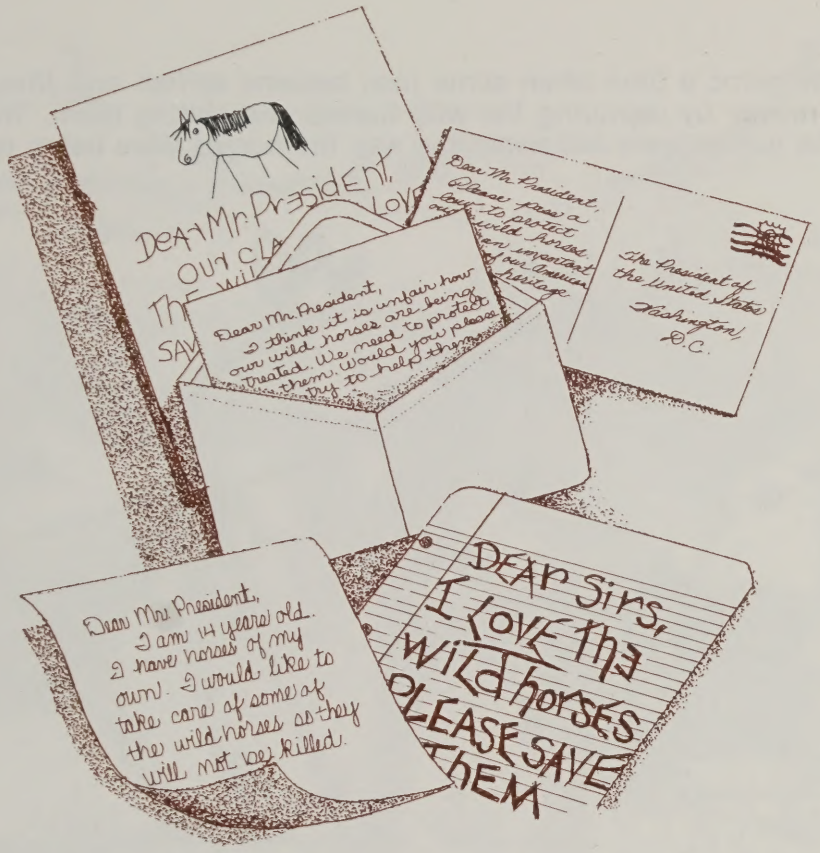
Soon the soldiers came west and with them came more horses. Many of their horses escaped and soon they were living with their friends in the wild.

They grazed on the same land with the buffalo.

No matter how the first horses came to be in our country, it is a fact that wild horses are living today.

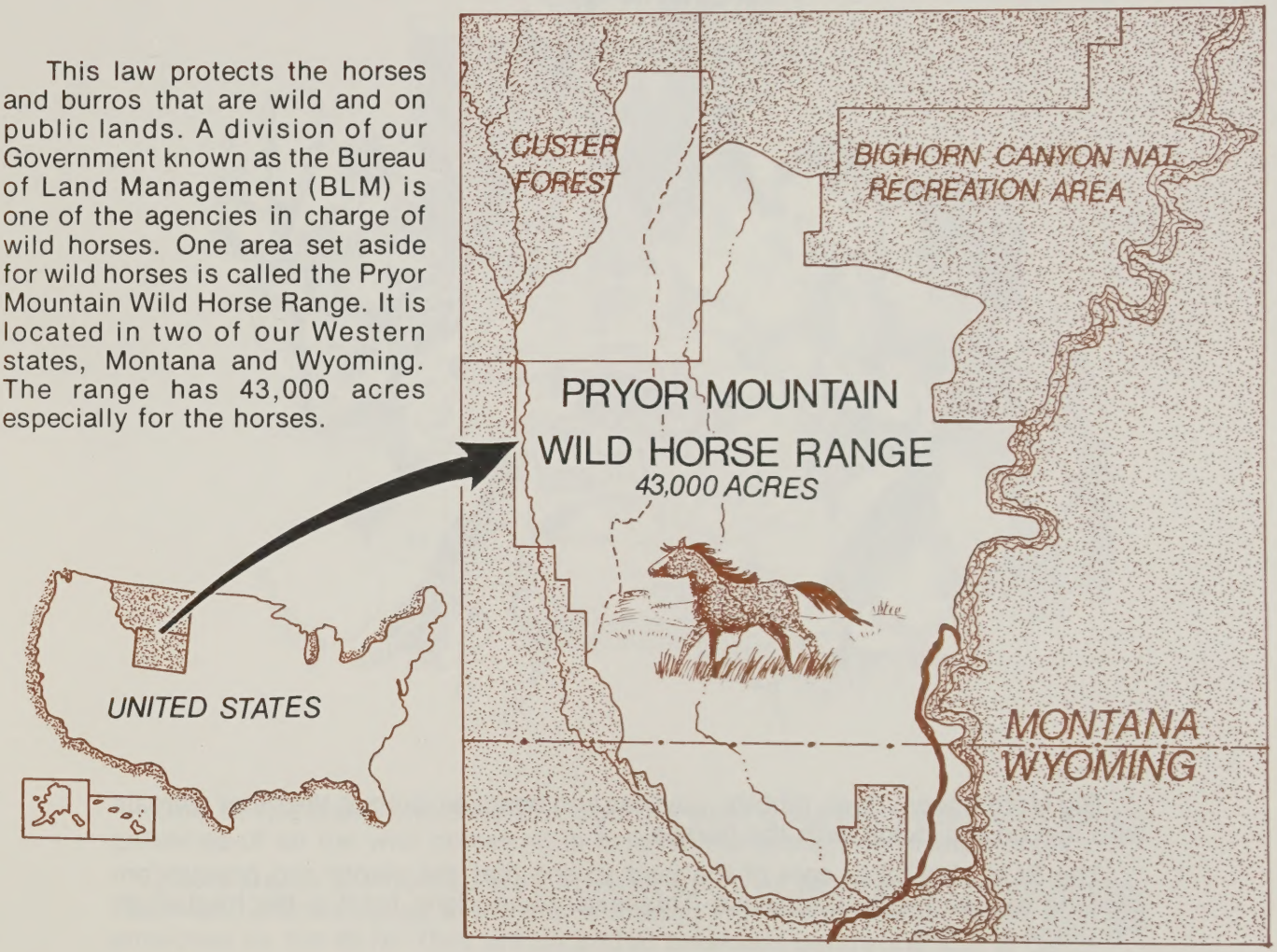
For hundreds of years the horses were seen running free. Almost everyone loved the wild horses.

Then there came a time when some men became selfish and thought they could make money by capturing the wild horses and selling them. The people who loved the horses were sad about the way the horses were being treated.



Because of their great love for the wild horses, these people wrote many letters to our Government. They asked that a law be passed that would protect the horses. After months of hard work by the people, the Congress passed a law which now protects the wild horses and burros. It is known as the Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971.

This law protects the horses and burros that are wild and on public lands. A division of our Government known as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is one of the agencies in charge of wild horses. One area set aside for wild horses is called the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. It is located in two of our Western states, Montana and Wyoming. The range has 43,000 acres especially for the horses.



Big Horn Sheep, deer, rabbits, coyotes and bears are among the other animals who live on the range with the horses.

The BLM also takes care of the land to see that the plants and grasses are growing well and without disease. This is very important, for it is the food of all the range animals.

One of the most important things the BLM does each year is to hold a gathering of all the wild horses. It is held for the protection of the horses.

Every March the horses are gathered up. This lasts about three weeks. Cowboys, who are called wranglers, will bring in the wild horses. These men are employed by the BLM. They are up and at breakfast before the sun is out.

They feed their horses which they will ride, and by daybreak the wranglers have brushed and saddled their horses.

Shortly, they are riding out into wild horse country. The March air is cold and snow clouds drift over the mountains. The slightest sound can be heard for miles in this quiet country.

The wranglers must travel slowly and quietly, for the wild horses are very smart.

At the first sign of the wranglers, the wild horses will run away. This range is their home and they know every canyon in which to hide. The horses do not understand that the wranglers who have come to capture them are their friends.

The wild horses live in small bands called harems. Almost every harem is dominated by the stallion. In his harem, he may have several mares and foals. The stallion is extremely brave and very proud of his harem. He will defend the mares and foals with his life. Not only will he defend his band from people he thinks will harm them, but from other stallions who may try to steal his mares.

Each harem has one mare who leads the band when running. She is called a lead mare. The stallion almost always runs behind his band so that he is between them and the enemy.

After searching for hours in the rough country, the wranglers spot a band of wild horses. Now the battle of wits is on!

Up and down the canyons and across the flat country they go! The wranglers' horses are not always use to this particular rough country and tire faster than the wild horses.

Soon the first wild horse is roped. The work of the wranglers is just beginning.

The horse is roped around the neck and then around his feet. His front and back feet are tied. This does not harm or injure the horse and the men are not unkind to the horses.

A veterinarian is there in case any of the horses are sick and need attention. There is also a brand inspector and it is his job to make sure no horses belonging to the ranchers have wandered in with the wild horses.

Some people may think if the horses are free, why are they being gathered up? There are many reasons for this. First, the wild horses are checked to make sure that they are not sick or injured. Their teeth are checked to see that they are able to chew properly. The men can also tell the age of the horse by his teeth.

SKULL
OF BENJIE

SKULL OF A
NORMAL HORSE

BENJIE

One little horse, by the name of "Benjie" was found by the men. He was about 10 months old and very beautiful. When the wranglers looked at Benjie's teeth, they found to their surprise, that he had a very strange shape to his mouth. He could not bite his front teeth together. It is believed that when he was just a new-born foal he was accidentally kicked in the nose by another horse. This caused his nose and teeth to grow crooked. He had been nursing from his mother all of this time. At the time the wranglers found Benjie, it was also time that he would no longer nurse.

If the men had not found him when they did, he would have died. Because of his mouth, Benjie could not bite the grass on the range. The wranglers took Benjie and put him in a corral. They fed him hay and gave him water. He could not graze on the range grass, but could live on the food which was given to him. Benjie would later be placed in a special home where he would be taken care of.

Second, a sample of blood is taken from each horse. This is not painful to the horse. From this blood, the veterinarian can tell if the horse has any diseases.

Third, the horse is given an ink mark on the inside of his lip. This mark is called a tattoo. He does not feel the tattoo. It will protect him from being stolen from the range. If the horse already has a tattoo, this means he has been counted before.

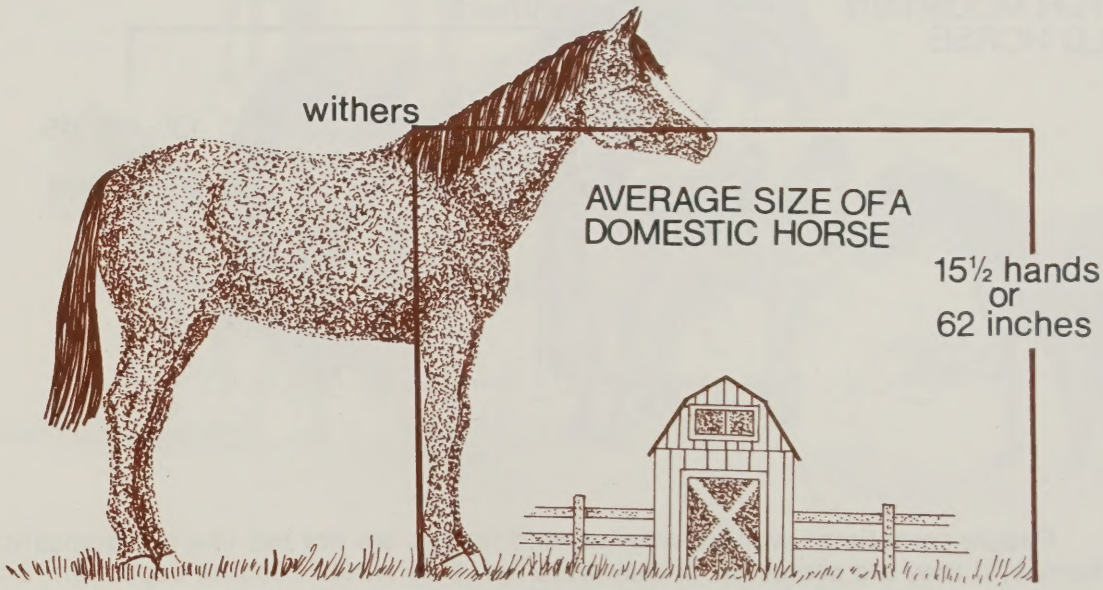
By tattooing, the BLM can keep close records of how long the horses live and how many new foals are born each year. New foals are usually born in May or June and by gathering time, the foals are about 10 months old.

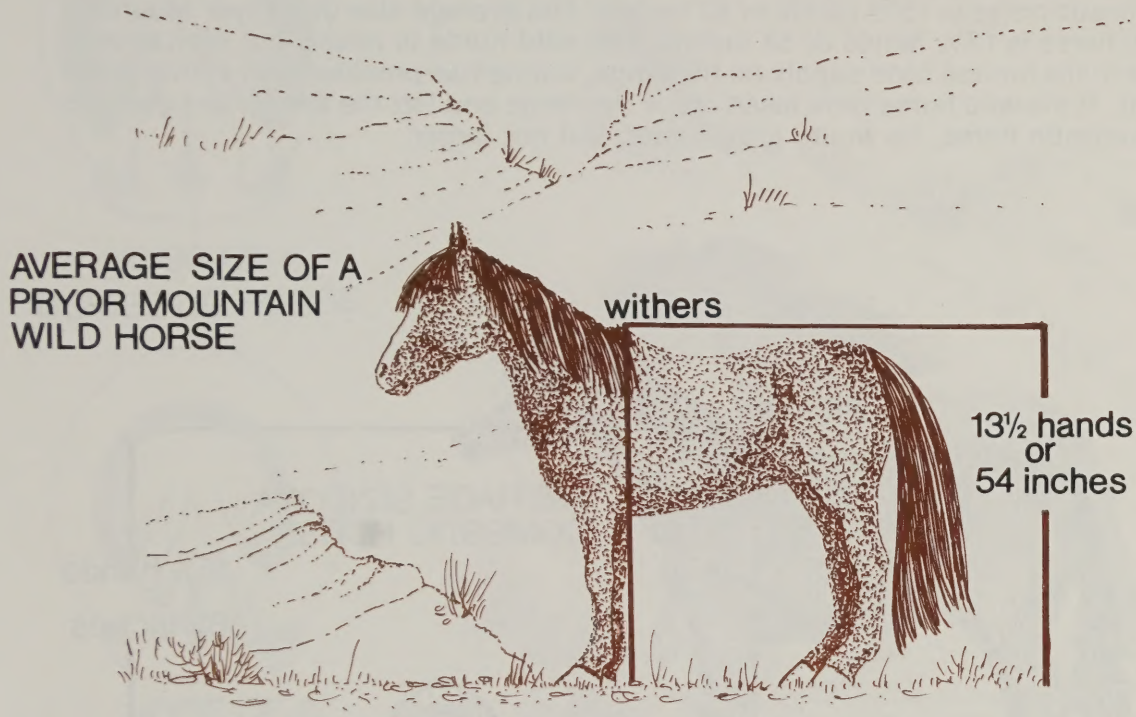
HOOF OF A
DOMESTIC HORSE

HOOF OF A
WILD HORSE

Fourth, the feet of the horses are checked. The wild horses have very strong feet. Their hooves are thick and smooth. They are unlike the hooves of our domestic horses. Wild horses never need their feet trimmed. They are kept in very good shape from climbing the rocky hillsides.

The size of a horse is measured in hands. One hand is equal to 4 inches. The horse is measured from the ground to the top of the withers. The average size of a domestic horse is 15½ hands or 62 inches. The average size of a Pryor Mountain wild horse is 13½ hands or 54 inches. The wild horse is small, but very strong. Due to the limited food supply on the range, nature has provided him with a small body. If the wild horse were taken off of the range and fed the same food given to a domestic horse, he would grow faster, but not larger.



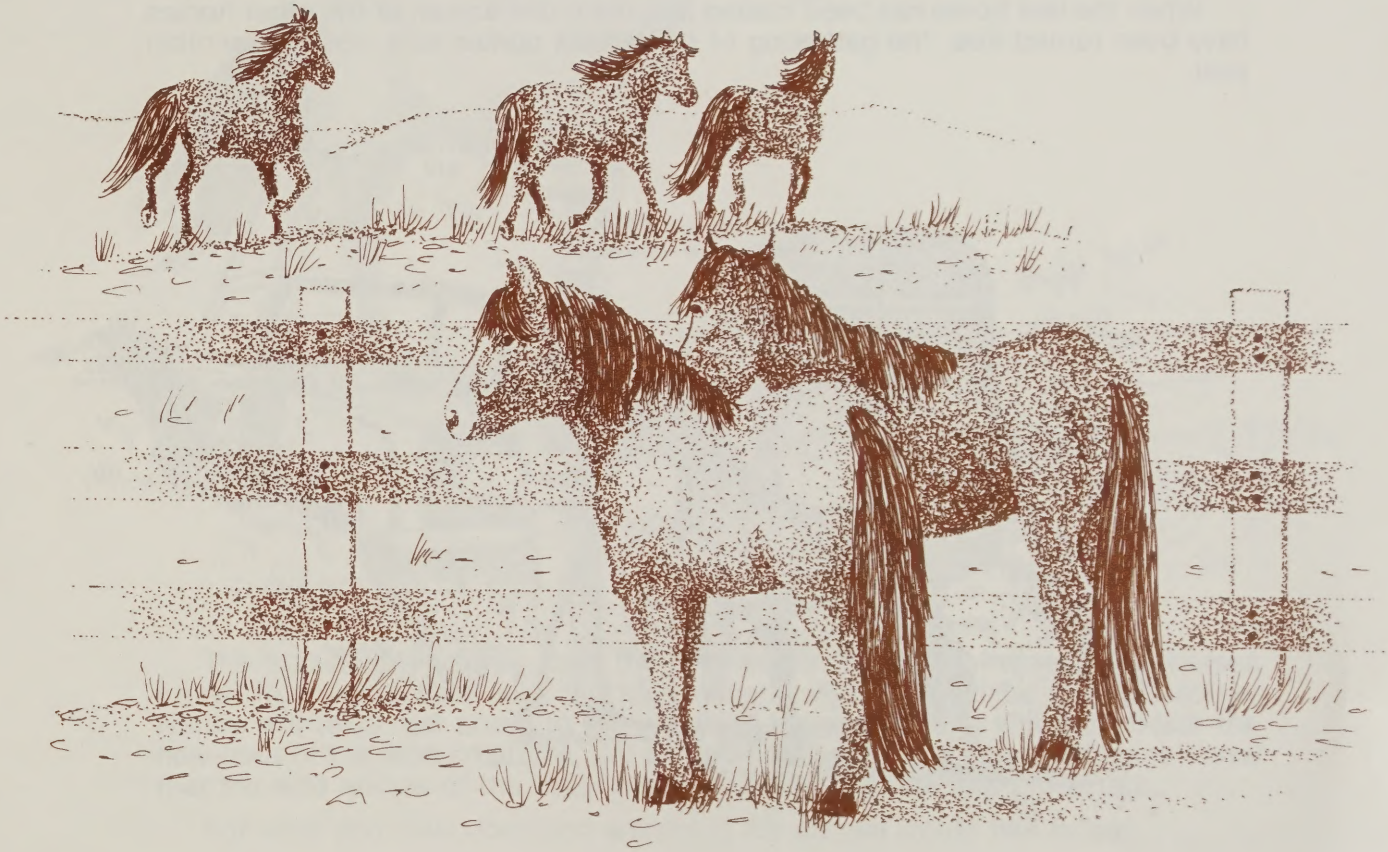


People sometimes wonder why the wild horses are not fed like our domestic horses, if they are protected. If they were fed, they would become dependent on us for food. They would no longer search for food for themselves and in turn they would not remain wild horses.

There is a fifth reason for gathering the horses. The limited food supply on the range makes it necessary for the total number of horses to be kept down to 130 to 150 horses at all times. If this were not done, there would be too many horses, not enough food, and some of the horses might die prematurely.

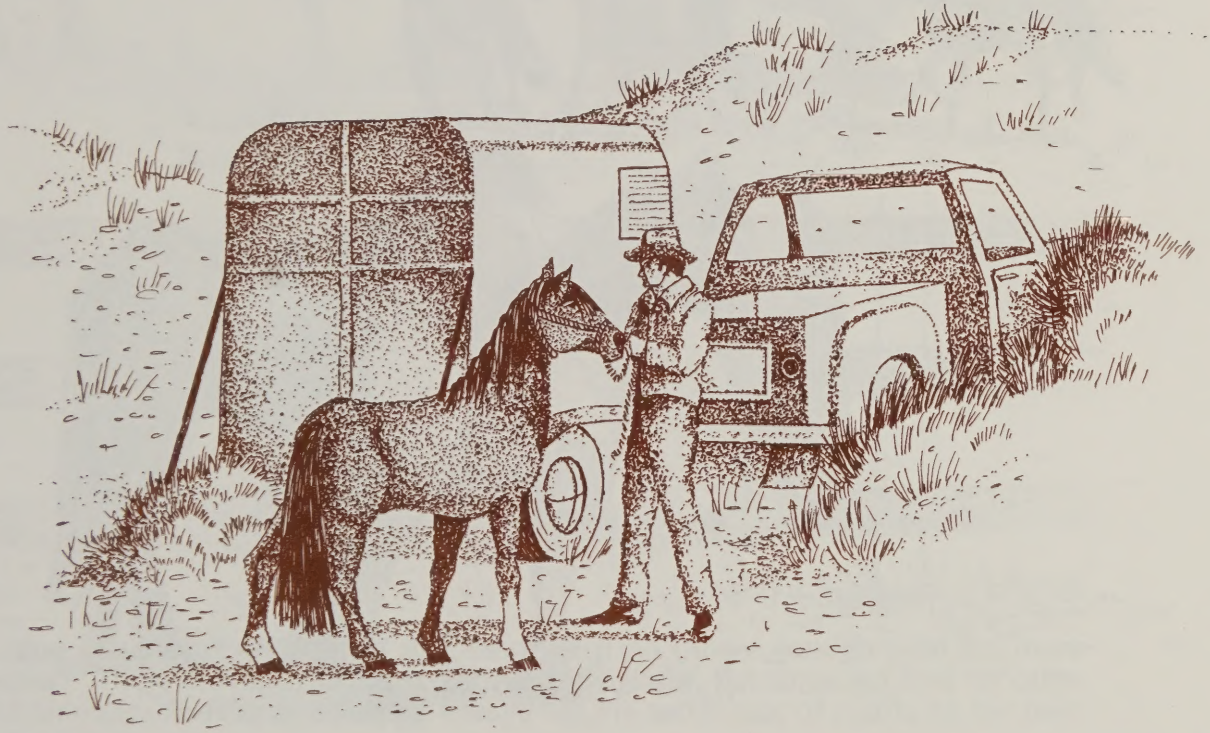
You may ask, "With all of that land, why isn't there enough food for more horses?" There are many kinds of plants on the range, but some are feed for other wild animals. The horse does not always eat the same type of plants as the deer or the bear.

Each year about 20 to 25 excess horses are removed from the range. Enough colts are left to balance the loss of horses due to old age. The remaining horses are turned free again. The horses that are removed are given away to people who will provide them with a good home.



A special citizens committee is chosen to help decide who will get the horses. After the committee decides where the horses will go, they notify the people to come to the corrals and pick up their horse. The horses given away are still under the protection of the BLM. They are checked to see if they are doing well in their new homes.

When the last horse has been loaded into the trailer and all of the other horses have been turned free, the gathering of the horses comes to a close for another year.



The horses given away start the journey to their new homes. The horses turned free gallop back into the high country. Soon it will be spring. Mother Nature will touch her brush to the plants of the prairie. She will bring forth the new-born of the wild creatures. All will come alive. It is a good feeling to know that the wild horses of the Pryor Mountains will live free and protected.

For what you have done and are doing for us, we would like to say.....

"THANK
YOU
FOR
HELPING
US."

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WILD HORSES AND BURROS IN THE WESTERN STATES

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